

**Quest for Self in Shashi Deshpande's *Moving On***

**Megha Mishra**

Research Scholar,  
Dept of English,  
Rani Durgawati University,  
Jabalpur (M.P.)

Psychoanalysis has equipped the modern literary critic with remarkable knowledge of the inner struggles of literary characters. It is now a common thing that Freud's discoveries of the complex nature of the human mind have led to a fundamental revolution in the approach to literary expressions. Attempts have been made through psychoanalysis to comprehensively view the nature of women's 'consciousness', and their concepts of self, as the society compels every individual especially women to repress instinctual urges and the desire for the free exercise of will, all in the name of upholding its ideals and expectations which are very oppressive.

Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent position among the significant Indian woman novelists. She deals with human issues and problems which are of interest to all humanity. She effectively portrays the Indian women as she handles the significant themes affecting the lives of women minutely, courageously and sensitively. Her novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. Shashi Deshpande's writings hold a universal appeal that clearly emanates from her rootedness in every day India – a society in which we breathe and a culture to which we belong. In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has strengthened the feminist movement by her deep analysis of man-woman relationship as she excels in the portrayal of woman characters. Her female protagonists are powerful ones that they are authentic characters and they deal with their problems triumphantly after recognizing their 'selves'.

Although the protagonists of her novels are women - the objects of cultural/ social oppressions, they revolt against their family traditions in search of freedom and quest for their 'selves'. Thus, they do try to redefine human relationship and behaviour. In this sense, her works are women-oriented, yet it would be unjust to brand her as a feminist for there is nothing doctrinaire about her writings and she believes that man -woman relationship should be treated on the line of equal rights. Shashi Deshpande's delineation of women characters is essentially from a psycho-analytical point of view. Deshpande's effort is not only a feminist concern, it's essentially psychological. Her effort is to lay threadbare the inner psyche of her characters as they are split personalities.

Shashi Deshpande's novel *Moving On* has been taken to prove a thing that man – woman relationship is of course an enigma by analyzing the characters from a psychoanalytical perspective. *Moving on* is a family story of intimate spaces, emotional wounds and intrusions that are absolutely unexpected. In the words of Chanchala K. Naik, "In probing into the complex relationship within the family, Deshpande weaves her narrative around multiple acts of

transgression while bringing into contestation self / other, man/woman, bone/body, physical/emotional, sexual/ethical, individual/social binaries". (218)

One of the aspects that contribute to the construction of the narrative is the issue of betrayals and violations. Shashi Deshpande usually has the heroine as the narrator, and employs a kind of stream-of-consciousness technique. In *Moving On*, Deshpande gives us a complex character who tries to achieve her real self through her struggles. The present story *Moving On* projects Manjari as a woman who resists the patriarchal ideology and tries to live on her own terms. It is a story that begins, conventionally enough with a woman's discovery of her father's diary. As Manjari unlocks the past through its pages 'rescuing old memories and recasting events and responses, the present makes its own demands. .

The novel symbolizes the inner struggle of the protagonist, Manjari, an educated one, a prematurely widowed, who lives in close association with society brushing aside all its narrow conventions. She is the daughter of an anatomist father, Badhri Narayan and a writer mother, Mai. Giving up studying medicine to marry Shyam, a person much below the social status of Narayan family, shows Manjari's steadfastness. In the words of Binod Mishra, "Manjari-Shyam relationship is based on the foundations of the body... Their union was the union of two hungry bodies and it had too little scope of any discussion, say even of wooing". (63) She often longs to feel a man's arm around to wish for a 'crushing grip'. Her immature behaviour is exposed when she stamps a kiss on Shyam's forehead announcing her declaration of love.

Manjari's married life with Shyam begins on a dismal note. She doesn't feel good at Shyam's house in a very disgusting and insuperable ambience. In the beginning of their married life, they are happy. After Manjari gives birth to Anand, the requirements increase. But Shyam couldn't fulfill it as unfortunately his prospects in film making also dwindle because of some flops and some proposals abandoned. He doesn't bother about family matters and the worst thing happens when he leaves his ailing son suffering in the lap of Manjari. This causes a strain in their married life. It creates a gap between Shyam and Manjari and there is a vacuum in their mutual understanding and love. In the words of Manjari, "Closeted in one small room though we were, we seemed to be living on two different continents. In bed, we lay close, but without touching. It was like the game of pebbles. I'd played as a girl. A game in which, if two pebbles touched, you were out". (Deshpande . 290)

As a lover, Shyam is perfect to Manjari. But he becomes an irresponsible husband and father when he has to meet the practical responsibilities in his married life. Manjari, who still longs to get some solace in the arms of Shyam, soon gets wriggling once the sexual spells are over. Shyam's professional failures and Manjari's increasing demands lead him to a state of depression. Meanwhile, driven by Anand's illness, Manjari stays in her father's house and this allows cracks in her marital life that keep the gap widening day by day. Shyam's calls have also been assaulted by Manjari as she is busy with the child. It may be the reason for Shyam's disloyalty to his wife that Malu, Manjari's sister, is made pregnant by him. Shyam's lack of concern for his wife is also more apparent in it. It manifests a truth that Shyam doesn't love Manjari now as he did love her once. Thus Shyam becomes a traitor in the eyes of Manjari and gradually Manjari's ill treatment makes him feel contempt for life. At the end, his sense of guilt troubles his conscience that leads him to commit suicide.

Married at eighteen and widowed at twenty one, Manjari becomes a burden to herself. Her short married life which receives a severe jolt after Shyam is drowned into the sea puts her

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

on a razor's edge. She has become bold, challenging and conscious. After Shyam's death, Manjari determines to discard all her bodily movements and rhythm as she would like to be faithful to Shyam's soul. This has been maintained by her for many years until she comes to touch the hand of Raman, a tenant living on the top floor in her house. It really makes us wonder that where Manjari's true love and faithfulness for Shyam have gone. For years, her sexual desires have been suppressed in her. The rigid restrictions of the society cannot stop the desires of the body as well as mind. One day, when she gets a chance, she fulfils her bodily hunger with a person of dubious identity. It is more like Freudian suppressed desires which cross all its barriers to get its due. Psychologists believe that suppressed desires always crave for release. In the case of Manjari too, we witness such a situation. After that she is totally confused and she herself feels that how her body which is alien to her all these years is suddenly ignited. "It is not his action that has disturbed as much as my own response, the way my body gave a startled leap in response to his touch, it's my body that frightens me, it's my body that is suddenly my enemy. I feel as if I have been invaded by a stranger, a stranger I'd kept out successfully for so long". (Deshpande .226-227)

As she is badly disturbed, her mind suffers a new conflict generated. Her sense of guilt troubles her conscience and she considers her act as a sort of disloyalty to Shyam's soul. But as she is struggling to control the demands of the bodily urges, she allows Raman to invade her body. To her, this is of course the meeting of their bodies and not of their souls. Once this act is over, she has to answer for the various queries made by her soul. To answer these queries, she undergoes a mental conflict and it is revealed in the following lines:

Her suppressed desires only have made her forget the difference between good and evil and she feels her guilty conscience pricking her mind. I want to pummel my body, to punish it with savage blows until it turns black and blue. I hate it, I want to disown it, I want to touch it, to let my hand move gently along accustomed routes, to feel its softness, its curves... (Deshpande.232)

She seems mentally deranged sometimes. Though it is an adulterous relationship, she is unique in providing her own explanation regarding her relationship with Raman, which is love-hate relationship. She says:

I don't want to hear his voice either. Only the body, his body, only my body, my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensation. The smell of sundried clothes, of sweet, the hardness, the pressure of his body, it's weight on mine and my body responding, welcoming his. (Deshpande .257)

She wants to forget everything. Though it is not acceptable in the society, it makes Manjari appear a different type.

Manjari's character really reminds us of other Indian woman novelists especially Manju Kapur whose novels are well known for women's issues. But Manjari is not as vulnerable as other protagonists. She is known for her boldness, defiance and sacrifice. As her parents are dead now and her grown up children are away, she is left alone with her own world and her own sexuality. And she faces life alone without anybody's support either morally or financially. Though she has to meet a painful period of struggle and strain, she manages the situation triumphantly. Her adulterous relationship with Raman is for the sake of satisfying her bodily

urges only and she is different in her approach too. But at the same time, she turns down her childhood friend, Raja's proposals quite rationally. This marks her character more individualistic. Manjari considers this sexual act as a mechanical affair.

Earlier when Manjari suddenly decides to rebel for the sake of marrying Shyam, a cinematographer, and to such an extent it causes a permanent rift between her and her family. This also provides the room for treating Manjari as the 'other' in a manner that she has no freedom to select her own life partner. In her relationship with her tenant also, her condition as a woman is critical, comparing to the condition of Raman. And one can raise a question towards this matter. The answer to this seemingly uncharacteristic behaviour lies somewhere in society's elaborate rules that deny a woman the expression of her sexuality while allowing this freedom to a man. In understanding Manjari's struggle, one is forced to rethink one's role in the tapestry of life.

Raja, Manjari's childhood friend, actually a widower, wants to achieve his married life again by marrying Manjari. To Manjari, this proposal seems to be for the sake of marriage rather than for love. Manjari thinks, "The reasons he produces for his desire to marry me certainly don't make him out to be an ardent lover" (Deshpande .39). Manjari refuses to accept his proposals and tries to explain but "Raja strenuously refutes all the arguments" (Deshpande .40) that Manjari produces. Since his boyhood days, he has had much love for Manjari. Actually his love and his desire for Manjari have been suppressed for years and of course they are at the unconscious level in the mind of Raja and now eager to find its way to release. Whenever time permits him, Raja almost compels Manjari to marry him by giving his own reasons. Though it may be for the sake of fulfilling his long time desire, Manjari's feelings should also be considered. Manjari is not a toy to provide her instant nodding to accept Raja's repeated proposals. She is known for her own experiences and marriage merely as a means of social security for a woman is not acceptable to Manjari.

When Manjari wants to buy a car to fulfill one of her middle-class dreams, Raja raises a question, "But why do you need a car?" (Deshpande. 65) Manjari replies, "I bet...if, I were a man, you'd never have asked that question" (Deshpande .65). Though Raja actually worries about Manjari's family condition and future that if she spends all her money in buying a car, what will she do in future as she has no job at present, he raises the question because of the fact that she is a woman. Manjari doesn't bother about Raja's advice and she hopes that she will get a job in future. Manjari feels that if a man is in the place of her, Raja will never ask such a question as car is usually considered a primary thing to a man but a secondary thing to a woman in the Indian society.

Manjari meets her real test of her life, when she has been visited by strangers and has received anonymous phone calls from the Mafia gang. This provides her a lot of mental pressure and almost forces her to sell out her ancestral house. When she doesn't respond to the threat of the mafia underworld, she is physically assaulted, almost on the verge of rape. She receives a phone call in the afternoon and the voice warns her as follows: "we don't want to hurt you, but ... you're a woman, don't forget that" (Deshpande.167). But she becomes more stubborn and decides not to sell the house but to stay and fight. She boldly meets the situation, "This is what they want, they're trying to reduce me to this shivering cowardly mass of fear. I won't be scared."(Deshpande. 167) Thus Manjari is bold enough to meet the situation though she is relegated to the 'other' by different persons in different manners.

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

In Shashi Deshpande's novels, the most important attribute of many of the women characters seems to be silence but Manjari is completely different that since the beginning of the novel, she has been a revolutionary one. Novelists like Beauvoir exhort women to achieve autonomy to discover and nurture their authentic self through lived experience for self-realization. This argument may apply in the case of Manjari, as she negotiates many opposed discourses and moves forward in a quest to know who and what she is.

Thus *Moving On* deals with the man-woman relationship within the institution of within marriage and outside. In the words of K. A .Agrawal, "All the novels of Shashi Deshpande centre around the family relationships and the necessity for women to live within relationships. Family is the nerve centre of all human activities in her novels." (73) Shashi Deshpande has exposed the real self and the other of Manjari in a psychological way. The novel projects Manjari as a complex character trying to reach her real self through the conflicting demands and roles of her life. Manjari is of course the new woman, who redefines freedom and also relationships. Though she is an affectionate daughter, a loving sister, a caring mother and a good friend, she is not dependent on anyone.

**Works Cited**

- Agarwal, K.A. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2003.Print.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *Moving On*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004. Print.
- Mishra, Binod. "Taming the body to Harness the Soul: A study of Shashi Deshpande's *Moving On*". *Points of View*. 2006. 54-59. Print.
- Naik .K .Chanchala . Ed. *Writing Difference The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. New Delhi Pencraft International ,2005. Print.